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STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/PPD, IIP/GNEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT TV IN JORDAN SLOW TO LAUNCH

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: ATV, JORDAN'S FIRST INDEPENDENT TELEVISION BROADCAST CHANNEL, HAS YET TO GO ON THE AIR MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER ITS INITIAL LAUNCH DATE WAS ANNOUNCED. WHILE ATV NEWS AND PROGRAMMING STAFF CONTINUE TO CONDUCT REAL-TIME PRACTICE PROGRAMS FOR THEIR EVENTUAL DEBUT ON THE AIR, STATION MANAGERS HAVE CEASED TO PROVIDE A FIRM LAUNCH DATE, INSTEAD ASSERTING THAT THE CHANNEL WILL APPEAR ONLY "WHEN THE CONDITIONS ARE RIGHT." PRIVATELY, ATV'S WELL-PAID STAFF EXPRESS FRUSTRATION, AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION OF ATV'S STATE-OF-THE-ART STUDIO FACILITIES IS SLOW. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) THE JORDAN UNITED TELEVISION BROADCAST COMPANY, KNOWN BY ITS CALL SIGN ATV, IS JORDAN'S FIRST INDEPENDENT TELEVISION CHANNEL, SET TO BROADCAST ON BOTH TERRESTRIAL AND SATELLITE SIGNALS. ATV WILL OFFER 24-HOUR NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMING, THE MAJORITY OF WHICH WILL BE PRODUCED LOCALLY, AIMED AT A GENERAL VIEWING AUDIENCE IN JORDAN AND THE WEST BANK. BY THE SPRING OF 2006, THE CHANNEL HAD HIRED A SIZEABLE NEWS STAFF, THE MOST SENIOR OF WHOM PREVIOUSLY WORKED FOR GULF-BASED PAN-ARAB SATELLITE TELEVISION COMPANIES. BOTH NEWS AND PROGRAMMING STAFF ARE REPORTEDLY ENGAGED FULL-TIME IN REPORTING AND PRODUCTION TRAINING EXERCISES IN ADVANCE OF THEIR DEBUT ON THE AIR.

13. (SBU) ATV WAS INITIALLY SCHEDULED TO LAUNCH IN SPRING OF LAST YEAR. LAUNCH DATES HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY POSTPONED DUE TO NON-SPECIFIC "TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES" ACCORDING TO ATV SOURCES, INCLUDING ITS FOUNDER AND MAJOR STAKEHOLDER, MOHAMED ALAYYAN, WHO ALSO PUBLISHES JORDAN'S LEADING INDEPENDENT ARABIC DAILY NEWSPAPER AL GHAD. TOWARDS THE END OF LAST YEAR, POST CONTACTS AT ATV STOPPED OFFERING A FIRM LAUNCH DATE, INSTEAD ASSERTING THAT THE CHANNEL WILL LAUNCH ONLY "WHEN CONDITIONS ARE RIGHT."

14. (SBU) PRIVATELY, ATV'S WELL-PAID STAFF EXPRESS FRUSTRATION AT THE DELAY AND ITS EXPLANATION. DURING A TOUR OF THE NEW STUDIOS EARLIER THIS WEEK BY PUBLIC DIPLOMACY DUBAI HUB DIRECTOR MICHAEL PELLETIER AND PAO, CONSTRUCTION OF THE STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES HAD CLEARLY SLOWED SHORT OF COMPLETION. ONE OF JORDAN'S LEADING FREE-SPEECH ADVOCATES, WHOSE ORGANIZATION HAS PROVIDED ATV STAFF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING, TOLD IO THAT ATV'S DELAY IS DUE PRIMARILY TO THE POOR PERFORMANCE OF THE BUILDING CONTRACTOR, AND DISCOUNTED ANY POLITICAL REASONS FOR THE LAUNCH DELAY.

HALE